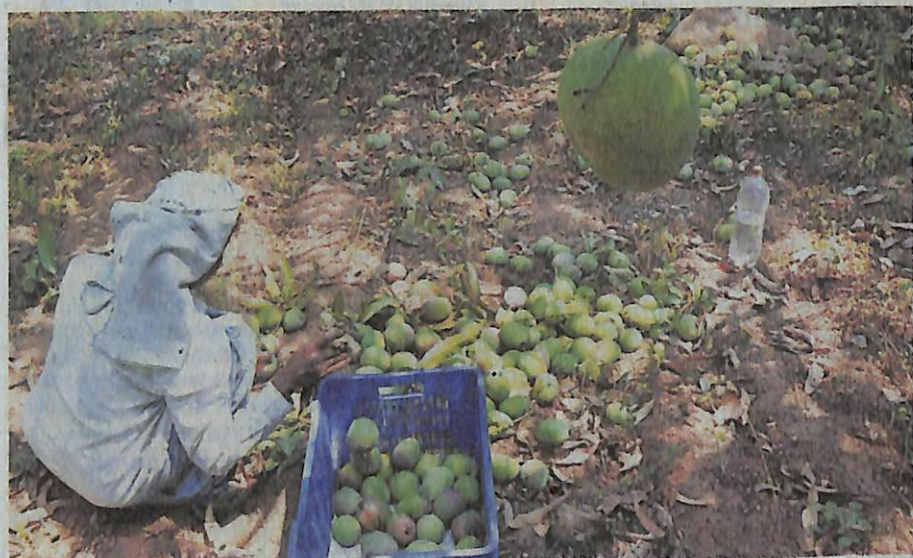


Muthalamada mango to go organic

Organic farming component forms part of ₹10-cr. plan



Strategic switchover: The State Horticulture Mission's plan to go organic at Muthalamada in Palakkad will help the mango farmers fight the pests menace. ■ K.K. MUSTAFAH

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The State Horticulture Mission (SHM) has announced plans to launch organic cultivation of mango in 500 acres of land in Palakkad district's Muthalamada, the mango hub of the State, this year.

Centrally funded, the pilot project will demonstrate the advantages of switching to organic methods in a region that has been witnessing the downsides of pesticide use, mission director Justin Mohan said.

"We are launching the programme in ten clusters of 50 acres each. The organic farming component forms one part of a ₹10-crore programme that will be implemented this year for developing mango cultivation at Muthalamada," Mr. Mohan said.

The State Horticulture Mission is getting ₹1.5 crore under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (tradi-

tional farming improvement programme) for the organic farming initiative. The State government agency will also get ₹2.75 crore under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and ₹4.25 crore under the mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture, a National Horticulture Mission (NHM) scheme.

Facilities for farmers

The latter component will be used to equip farmers with cold storage units and vans for transportation, harvesting equipment plus support for area expansion. Further, irrigation will be expanded using ₹1.5 crore from the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).

Mr. Mohan said, "Organic produce is in great demand in the international market. In fact, farmers stand to get thrice the price they are getting now," he said.

Incidentally, the SHM

scheme could not have come at a better time for Muthalamada. The mangoes here have been plagued by attacks of the mango hopper pest this season. Such has been the extent of the menace that the yield might be poor this year, Nemmara MLA K. Babu told *The Hindu*. "There is a chance that we may face a loss this year," Mr. Babu said.

According to government estimates, 3,500 hectares of land are under mango cultivation at Muthalamada. In reality, it is spread over a much larger area, says farmers' associations.

Mango cultivation at Muthalamada can remain sustainable only by going 'organic,' Arumughan Pathichira, secretary, Muthalamada Mango Farmers' Welfare Association, said.

"Farmers here are using pesticides mixed indiscriminately and at unscientific dosages. This has to end," he said.